

Underground Pipeline, Inc.



L to R Norb Dretzka, Jeff Dretzka

In 1984, two Native American brothers, Norb and Jeff Dretzka, started a sewer and water construction company called Underground Pipeline, Inc. (UPI), that is now located in New Berlin, Wisconsin.

Construction work is seasonal, often forcing winter layoffs, coupled with today's skyrocketing insurance and fuel costs, desirable margins in Wisconsin have dwindled. In 2003, Jeff and Norb decided to expand UPI to include a manufacturing business, d/b/a UPI, Mfg. This would potentially provide year-round work, with less operating over-head.

Being Native American, Jeff and Norb have been members of the American Indian Chamber of Commerce (AICC) for many years. It was at one of the AICC meetings they first heard about the SBA 8(a) program, an aid to small business start-ups. They realized this might be the answer to help their new manufacturing division start-up.

In June of 2003, they contacted SBA and met the SBA/Med team of Linda, Joe and Cheryl. The SBA team was encouraging, cooperative answering initial questions like; How can the 8(a) Program benefit us, and Who can help us learn government contracting? Linda and the team were able to point them to programs, personalities, conferences and conventions that aided them in their quest to start a manufacturing division.

Over the next eight months, the SBA team met with the Dretzka team, helping them register as an 8(a) Native American small business. In April of 2004, they became a certified 8(a) client and SDB company.

Following 8(a) certification, one of their first visits was to the Defense Supply Center Columbus (DSCC) to meet with 8(a) small business specialist Will Chavez. Mr. Chavez offered advice and proper procedures to becoming a successful 8(a) small business utilizing the DSCC solicitations. They also met with the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA), Milwaukee. The DCMA team gave outstanding support, offering guidance through contract questions, proper routing of paperwork, and qualified Quality Assurance Representatives.

All of the above resulted in UPI Manufacturing's first awarded contract in December of 2004 worth \$520.00. Since that auspicious beginning, they have received thirty-two contract awards of which twenty-five have been completed and shipped. It may be of interest to note that the process between finding a contract to bid on and having an item "set-aside" is very involved.

One such set-aside part being produced by UPI is a right and left hand 3" thick bulletproof ballistic window designed for the HMMWV. These windows are in such demand that each contract is accompanied by a HIGH PRIORITY BACKORDER request. UPI Mfg. has been able to ship each contract earlier than the due date – one as early as 4 months early.

For twenty years, UPI has remained a registered small business, bidding against local and national sewer and water companies for contracts and never taking advantage of their Native American heritage via the government's 8(a) set-aside program. Today, UPI is still a successful sewer and water company, employing 37 people and doing \$8 to \$10 million dollars in annual sales.

The UPI Manufacturing operation has grown substantially requiring them to move to a larger facility of their own that employs five people with projected sales of \$4.8 million.

The Dretzka brothers appreciate the job the troops are doing to keep America a safe place for our families. In return, UPI is dedicated to aiding them by producing much needed quality parts in a timely manner.

Underground Pipeline lives by their active mission statement, "Deeds Not Words." SBA is proud to have been of assistance to this successful Native American business.

"May God Protect Those Who Protect Us."